

Wisconsin Bear Advisory Committee Meeting

Tuesday, November 13, 2018

8:30 – 3:00

Meeting convened at 8:45

Public Input (3 minutes per public attendee) – No public members provided input

Revisiting Bear Population Goal Metrics

- Nathan R. Presentation

- Models are currently based off of ages from harvest
 - Still gives us the ability to project forward
- We will have a graph for the statewide population with a breakdown by zone
- We could plug in numbers and project out what will happen to the population in the future if age structure stays the same
- If we have a numerical goal for harvest zones with a +/-, making sure the mean value falls in the range and not consider the scenarios that don't fall within that goal.
 - If the population changes and falls outside of the range – we would take management action
 - Management decisions need to be based on metrics that are easy to measure
- Mark-Recapture Study
 - Pros
 - Reinforce projected estimate from graph
 - More frequent study could how any apparent bias
 - Hair snare recapture methods are less bias than harvest recapture
 - Cons
 - ~\$700,000 for a one-year study
 - Data gap if only done every 3-5 years
 - Implications of data gap during transitions period
 - If the population estimate for the mark-recapture study didn't fall within the projected range, we would have to re-assess

- Metrics to Base Management Goals

- We should have a statement in the plan that outlines that the numeric goal still allows the species to satisfy its biological role.
- Numeric goals will not be listed in the plan
- If the bears aren't causing more problems, we could allow the population to go up in that zone and modify the numeric goal to increase towards the top of the projected population range on the graph.

- Non-numeric goals allow to have more flexibility, but the community feels better with a number figure in hand with that number compared to the overall estimated state population.
- We would have a numeric estimate to satisfy the number-in-hand (Statewide # and a break down # per zone) need of the public, but the following metrics would determine the parameters around when we need to modify management decisions:
 - Agricultural Damage
 - Hunter Satisfaction
 - Nuisance Complaints
 - Crowding
 - Hunter Success – Hard to properly measure
- While primarily looking at the above metrics, we would also need to pay attention to the trends of each and specify parameters while not having defined thresholds.
- Main goal is to maintain a healthy bear population while increasing availability – State Statute
- Specify how to identify and define the metrics to properly satisfy the goals that we want to achieve
- Further thoughts:
 - Even though we stated issuing permits in general bear complaint areas, it didn't lower those complaints until we directly specified the area.
 - We are not going to allow baiting flexibility to counteract crop damage
 - We are not required to have a specific number by statute in the plan

Committee recommendation: Move away from numeric goals, and instead base annual quota decisions (and hence decisions to increase/decrease/stabilize the bear population) on trends in 1) agricultural damage, 2) nuisance complaints, 3) crowding, 4) hunter success, 5) hunter satisfaction, 6) bear disease/health issues, and 7) allowing bears to maintain their ecological role. 3-year trends in available metrics will be utilized, and specific data to be reviewed annually will need to be identified.

Black Bear Range Expansion

- **Goals for new Central Forest zone**
 - Methods
 - Currently baiting only
 - Concern about adding hound hunting into these historically “bait only” new zones.
 - Allowing Hound Hunting
 - Pros
 - Allowing hounds in this zone would allow for less depredations from wolves in the northern zones.
 - If hunters had problems with hound depredations in the north, it would give them a lower risk alternative.
 - Getting the bears that aren't getting harvested by bait hunters

- Cons
 - Would never get permission to run dogs there anyway since landowners would know the implications due to private land
 - Hounds are running through private land anyway in other zones, why not allow it here?
 - Land is much more fragmented in CF
 - Wouldn't be an expansion of people coming in, since they are already there, and it would allow them to further their practices.
- Sub-divide into a smaller Central Forest zone – **Not going to separate out a smaller Central Forest Zone**
 - Pros
 - Increase quality of the hunt with the good habitat
 - Limit overcrowding that is currently happening there by controlling permits
 - Cons
 - Could create a “sink” to the central forest area
 - Longer wait times if we make it smaller
 - The smaller the zone the less accurate population estimates

Committee recommendation: Allow hound hunting in the “new” Central Forest Zone. Manage bear populations in the “new” Central Forest and Driftless (southwest) zones according to the non-numeric metrics (ag damage, hunter success, etc.) outlined above. This recognizes that these zones provide suitable bear habitat, but allows populations to be managed in response to social concerns. The goal for the “new” southeast zone will be to allow more flexible local management by citizens/landowners via access to harvest permits.

Lunch – 12:05

Reconvene – 12:45

Season Dates and Season Structure

- If there is a harvest in August, there may be problems with hunters discarding harvested bears due to warm weather and problems with decomposition.
 - May initiate rippling changes to tribal agreement related to opening dates.
 - Class A tags on damage properties early?
 - Have to check the statute/code
 - Selectivity wouldn't allow the objective to take care of that damage problem to be more guaranteed
 - Hunts have better access to damage cases
 - Class A license holders better access to Damage cases
 - **Opening date stays the same, but create a better way for hunters to have access to bears during the primary damage season in July/Aug.**

Alternating Hound Hunting and Bait Sitting Options – No Changes

Spring Bear Season – No Changes

Hunting Methodology

- **Effects of Baiting on Conflicts**
 - Member claims no link between dog depredations and density of baiting sites, but MI/WI analysis showing higher dog depredations in WI tied to liberal baiting regulations was mentioned.
 - Trail cameras are increasing and if wolves were found at site, many hunters would move the bait- may provide good means of reducing hound depredations.
- **Effect of Baiting on Bear Health**
 - Length of Baiting Season – **Need more research**
 - Baiting may be interrupting a bear's natural feeding habits, not allowing bears to truly satisfy their ecological role during the early baiting season
 - Member comments:
 - Why do we need to bait for so long before hunting?
 - The reasoning behind it is that historical, that is how it has been.
 - Baiting, under state code, is only allowed for hunting purposes/ dog training yet it is happening months before hunting is allowed.
 - Only “newbies” are taking advantage of the early baiting to try to get ahead, but not truly needed
 - County and State Forests could further restrict baiting activities
 - Baiting is a large factor allowing the bear population to increase so much
 - Couldn't we take time off of the length of baiting and still accomplish the hunting goal?
 - **Committee recommendation: Prioritize research that would help us identify impacts of bait on bear demography (reproduction, etc.) and health, and levels of wolf depredations on hunting dogs. Contribution of non-resident hunters to wolf depredations on hounds should also be identified and monitored, and research should include means of assessing/identifying options for reducing hound depredations by wolves.**
 - We would have to have insurance of a deadline for the fruition of this issue
 - This research is of high priority and has a high likelihood to be approved
 - Study design would have to be discussed to satisfy the objectives
 - Compare to other states regulations and outcomes
- **Non-residence impact on the inflation of dog-wolf depredations**
 - Initial increase, but not anymore

- The non-residences limited knowledge of the area and of wolf presence that increases depts. on their dogs
- Less non-residence coming to WI due to the presence of wolves
- **Length of Training Season**
 - Old UWSP study – small sample size
 - Best Management Practices (BMP's) – determined through research
 - Need More information/research for:
 - Length of chase
 - Cub separation
 - Other potential impacts on bear health
 - Helps to defend the reasons we do what we do
 - Member doesn't feel the need for the research since they "already do" what the conclusions of the research would be
 - It comes down to Hunter Ethics

Committee recommendation: Research to identify impacts of hound hunting/chases on bear health. Information will be needed to develop Best Management Practices that will support continued use of hounds for bear hunting in Wisconsin.

- **Amount of bait/number of bait sights allowed – We can't evaluate until we know the true impact of bait on bears which would also affect baiting length**
- **Type of Bait Allowed – Not covered**
 - Specify better ways to limit non-bear species access to bait, even after bears first visit.
- **Leftover Permits – Not going to change**
 - Success rate calculated by permits issued by animals harvested.
 - Leftover permits issued will higher success rate and wouldn't end up changing the overall number of permits issued
 - Reissuing leftover permits was a major pain

Where are we headed

- **Next meeting: Nov. 30th. Primary goal will be to develop quotas for the 2019 bear season; Committee will continue evaluation of issues for the bear plan revision as time allows. .**

Research Needs:

Wolf depredation of bears
 Health impacts of Baiting
 # of Cubs and how many make it through the first year
 Health impacts of length of chase (BMP's)

Meeting adjourned at 3:00pm.

Bear Advisory Committee Attendance

Scott Walter – DNR – Chair

Monty Brink – Oconto Co (WCFA)

Greg Kessler – DNR

Miles Falck – GLIFWC

Jed Hopp – DNR

Nathan Roberts – DNR

Michele Woodford – DNR

Brad Koele – DNR

Ralph Fritsch – WWF

Mike Robers – Agriculture

Brian Dhuey – DNR

Michael Rogers – WI. Conservation Congress

Amie Egstad – DNR

Linda Olver – DNR

Dan Eklund – USDA – FS – CNNF

Richard Kirchmeyer – WI Bowhunters Association

Lucas Withrow – HRC

“Illegible Name” – WBHA

Nancy Frost – DNR

John Huff – DNR

Non-Board Attendees

Bob Nack – DNR

Nathan Kluge – DNR

Glenn Stauffer – DNR

Laura McMahon – DNR

Jennifer Garde – Wolf Patrol